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Trade union records relating to women*

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- [Introduction](#)
- [The records](#)

Introduction

Trade union records held by the Archives are rich in information on women in the workforce, covering specific issues affecting particular industries as well as wider concerns such as equal pay.

This article is divided into the following sections:

- a) records of individual unions;
- b) records of the Australian Council of Trade Unions; and
- c) photographs and printed material.

It should be noted that because of the wealth of material available, this paper concentrates on broad descriptions of union records.

The records

a) Records of individual unions

Records of unions covering industries that have a high percentage of women in their workforce:

i) Teaching:

Australian Teachers Federation:

The Australian Teachers Federation was a corporate association of autonomous state teacher organisations. Holdings date from 1937, with key series including minutes of annual council meetings (1937–60), annual conference minutes (1937–41 and 1945–80), and correspondence and office files (1950–82).

Technical and Further Education Teachers Association of Australia:

Records cover the period 1964–85 and comprise mainly correspondence and office files (1971–82), conference minutes and related papers (1964–82), and executive committee papers (1977–84).

* Since this article was written in 1986, significant additions have been made to most of the collections mentioned. Detailed finding aids of these additions are available at the Archives.

Five state-based teaching unions, including:

- New South Wales Teachers Federation: annual reports (1919-43) and minutes (1919-26, 1953-65);
- Victorian Teachers Union: council minutes (1901-74) and Victorian Teachers Union Technical Women's Branch: minutes (1937-46);
- South Australian Institute of Teachers: executive minutes (1951-74) and High School Women's Association (1943-64), plus records of earlier teacher organisations dating from 1890 that amalgamated to form the Institute;
- Queensland Teachers Union: agendas, reports and papers submitted to council meetings and annual conferences for the period 1964-82;
- Tasmanian Teachers Federation: executive minutes (1949-70); council minutes (1944-69) and annual conference minutes (1939-43).

Institute of Inspectors of Schools: late 1950s and early 1960s.

ii) Nursing:

New South Wales Nurses Association:

minutes of council and divisional committee meetings (1933-76), executive minutes (1961-73), and conference minutes (1947-79).

Royal Australian Nursing Federation (ACT Branch):

minutes of Federal Council meetings (1963-82), minutes of Federal Executive meetings (1968-81), and subject files mainly covering local issues.

Spanish Relief Committee:

which sent four volunteer nurses to Spain in October 1936. This collection includes the minutes of committee meetings (1936-40), correspondence received from the nurses between 1936 and 1939, and reminiscences and extracts from the diary of one of the nurses, Una Wilson. Recent additions include a number of photographs of these women.

iii) Clothing trade:

Clothing and Allied Trade Union:

includes records from the Federal Office and South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales branches (1870 to the 1970s). The records of this union incorporate those of the Victorian Tailoresses Union, which was formed 1882, becoming the first union of women workers in Australia.

Federated Felt Hatting and Allied Trade Employees Union of Australia (Federal Office and New South Wales Branch) 1885-1959:

the union amalgamated with the Australian Textile Workers Union in 1984. Records include Federal Council and Committee of Management Minutes (1912-48), as well as correspondence, financial and arbitration records.

Records of unions covering industries that have a significant percentage of women in their workforce:

i) Boot trade and other factory employment:

Australian Boot Trade Employees Federation: including records from:

- Federal Office (1906-53);
- New South Wales Branch (1900-56);
- Queensland Branch (1885-1963);
- South Australian Branch (1886-1960);
- Tasmanian Branch (1909-1963); and
- Victorian Branch (1914-75).

Factory Employees Union of Australia (December 1909–January 1911): the union was particularly concerned with the wages and conditions of women workers in paper mills and laundries, and in such industries as biscuit making, jam production, and soap and candle manufacturing.

ii) Retail trade:

Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees Federation of Australia:

- South Australian records (1938-65); and
- Victorian Branch records (1900-1941).

iii) Office work:

- Administration and Clerical Officers Association (federal records, 1916–85);
- Australian Bank Employees Union (1919–1970s);
- Australian Government Lawyers Association (1939–84);
- Australian Government Workers Association (South Australian Branch, 1906–57);
- Australian Insurance Employees Union (Federal Office and the South Australian Branch, 1920–65);
- Australian Postal and Telecommunications Union (Federal Office 1910–74, Queensland Branch 1954–69, Tasmanian Branch 1930–60, Victorian Branch 1902–60);
- Australian Public Service Association (Federal Office and Australian Capital Territory Branch, c1940s–80s);
- Australian Third Division Telegraphists (National, Queensland and South Australian Branches, 1906–68);
- Commonwealth Bank Officers Association (1926–63);
- Federated Clerks Union of Australia (Tax Branch, 1927–82); and
- Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists (1963–78).

Records of unions covering industries that have a low percentage of women in their workforce but where this has increased during a specific period:

The metal industry during World War II is a prime example of this situation. For this period relevant records are held for the following unions:

- Amalgamated Engineering Union;
- Arms Explosives and Mmunition Workers Federation of Australia, which amalgamated with the Federated Ironworkers Association;
- Blacksmiths Society of Australia;
- Boilermakers Society of Australia;
- Federated Agricultural Implement and Stovemakers Porcelain Enamellers and Ironworkers Association;
- Federated Ironworkers Association; and
- Sheet Metal Working Industrial Union of Australia.

Records of unions covering industries that have a low percentage of women in their workforce, but where women provide supporting services to those unions:

Examples of this kind of involvement can be noted in the:

- Australian Coal and Shale Employees Federation;
- Australian Railway Union;
- Seamen's Union of Australia; and
- Waterside Workers Federation of Australia.

b) Records of the Australian Council of Trade Unions

In addition to ACTU Congress papers (1927–81), the Australian Council of Trade Unions collection also includes executive minutes for the period 1927-79 and a very large series of registry (Secretary's) files that date from the organisation's earliest days to c1981. File titles in this last series include *Female Rates Conference* (1948), *Status of Women's Commission* (1947), *Migrant Women's Committee* (1969), *Women Workers and Trade Unions* (1966) and *Working Women's Charter* (1977-78).

c) Photographs and printed material

Collections that include photographs of women at work and participating in trade union activities include:

- Australian Coal and Shale Employees Federation: photographs of members of the Women's Auxiliary;
- Bedggood & Co. Pty Ltd: photographs of women making flying boots during World War II;
- CSR Limited: views of women working in the bag factories at Pyrmont and Yarraville and the Golden Syrup packing station (c1930s–50s);
- Dunlop Rubber (Australia) Ltd: photographs of women working in the company factory between 1914 and 1918; and
- Laycock Son & Company: a photograph album dating from 1934-37 including photographs of women working the firm's textile mill.

The Archives also collects union journals and in-house company magazines, which often contain information about women workers. Two examples are:

- Tooth's *KB Chronicle* (1933-40 and 1948-54, with some gaps); and
- *Railroad*, the journal of the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Railways Union.

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